

Lights and Shadows: Construction of Collective Identity in Social Movement in Post-Socialist Macedonia¹

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Summary

This article analyzes construction of post-ethnic collective identity in the 2014-2016 Macedonian social movements. Instead of looking at the large-scale political changes as a yard stick for a success or a failure of a social movement, it focuses on the cognitive process of collective identity and social action, whereby heterogeneous individuals come together as a collective entity, learn to understand their grievances in collective terms, and nurture a new sense of group-identity in relation to the external environment. It sees that this process itself – based on shared memories of collective struggle for the common interest against the common enemy – shall be understood as a fruitful outcome of a social movement that generates new movement biographies for sustainable and permanent ‘we-ness’. In the light of Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans’ ‘tripod approach’ to collective identity, it furthermore argues that the success of a long-lasting social movement lies on making of politically relevant collective identity that appeals to social bystanders in the general public, and that this inclusive and societal context beyond the ethno-nationalist rhetoric was a driving force behind the real success of the 2014-2016 movements.

Introduction

After Talat Xhaferi, an ethnic Albanian politician, was appointed as the new speaker of the Macedonian parliament in April 2017, around 200 supporters of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, *VMRO-DPMNE*, stormed the parliament and attacked journalists and several members of Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, *SDSM*, including now the Prime Minister of Macedonia, Zoran Zaev. An angry mob sang Macedonian national songs and waved Macedonian flags, while Zaev, blood pouring from his forehead, and 102 other injured Members of Parliament had to be evacuated by the police rescue squad. This shocking brawl came after months of timid coalition talks between Zaev and his Albanian partners, and after the President’s, Gjorge Ivanov, refusal to hand Zaev the mandate. The same time last year, the deep political division was still there – yet, the situation was different. In April 2016, the student protests that began two years earlier grew into a full-blown nation-wide movement against rampant clientelism and corruption under then the Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski, and, for the first time in a decade, Gruevski’s *VMRO-DPMNE* – despite a narrow election win – failed to form a new coalition and was eventually overthrown in December 2016. The ongoing scandal, however, evidences the persistent social and political instability in the country, and its yet-superficial democracy that continues to shape Macedonia’s political scene. As one NGO worker said in an interview, ‘some of the political elites in the country, including the former ruling party, are only deepening the gaps between the people, instead of working to bridge them together’². Despite the two-year-long struggle against authoritarian populism, the chronic ill of post-socialist Macedonian society seem to have yet been defeated. It is true that, as some write³⁴, the political

¹ Article forthcoming on *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, 57(4): 41-53.

² Aleksander Dimishkovski, “Macedonia has new government, but rocky road ahead”, *New York Times*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/world/europe/macedonia-zoran-zaev-election.html> (accessed June 25, 2017).

³ Dimitar Bechev, “What is happening in Macedonia?”, *Al Jazeera*, April 30, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/04/happening-macedonia-170430135004624.html> (accessed June 01, 2017).

⁴ Paul Reef, “Macedonia’s Colorful Revolution and the Election of 2016. A Change for Democracy, or All for Nothing?”, *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 1 (2017).

schisms that had pervaded Macedonian society for years nevertheless continue. What was then the two-year-long struggle against authoritarian populism all for? The same problem is said to continuously jeopardize the country's democratic development: Were the 2014-2016 movements really all for nothing?

This article addresses the 2014-2016 Macedonian social movements as a cognitive process, wherein individuals with diverse backgrounds learned to understand themselves as a collective entity with shared grievances towards social and political injustice. Instead of looking at macro-level political outcomes as a yardstick for a success or a failure of a social movement, it focuses on the process of a coming-together among heterogeneous members of society who construct self-awareness as an in-group in a power struggle with a political out-group. Understanding a social movement through the lens of collective identity is especially important in the Macedonian context, because the success of the 2014-2016 social movements – and I will detail this further later – lied on construction of inclusive group-ness as a unified social actor beyond the social and political divisions that had been the dominant feature of much short-lived earlier movements. What follows below is the story of the new sense of collective identity in post-socialist Macedonia beyond the ethno-nationalist rhetoric, that of shared experience of a struggle against the decade-long reign of authoritarian populism, and that of new movement biographies that made an example of a sustainable social movement for generations to come.

Making of 'We' in Social Movement

In contrast to more commonly reflected tradition of social movement scholarship, social psychology of protest is much more concerned with the social sense of the identity component, as Bert Klandermans and Marga de Weerd write: 'by taking group membership as a constituent of identity'⁵. Conversely, the acquisition of a collective 'we' in the vein of social movement literature – being able to act, believe, or identify collectively – is a learning process, wherein one actively learns to associate oneself with an in-group and its members that eventually leads to 'acting-together' that we can refer to as a social movement. This arises, as Taylor and Whittier⁶⁷ write, from a set of in-group definitions that reflect the collective interests, and is maintained by interactions between its members and their politicized-valORIZED consciousness – a consciousness that otherwise remains politically neutral⁸. Construction of collectiveness in the context of a social protest, therefore, is highly dependent on a shared experience, and, in specific, with social injustice – be it corruption, housing problem, police brutality, or high unemployment, which potential in-group members can raise shared awareness against and respond to, and, therefore, being able to give politicized meanings to their group-identity and thereafter-following social movements. A shared experience is an important one here, because it is this collective understanding of social injustice that allows people to stand up against their opponents and it is this reciprocity that makes their collective identity and action politically meaningful and significant. This can be most observed in movements, whose members mobilize around issues dealing with shared experiences of an often-broader population, e.g. peace protests following terrorist attacks in London, Paris, and Manchester in 2016 and 2017.

On the other hand, social psychological interest over collective identities and actions lies on the issue of the structural influences of in- and out-group boundaries followed by self-categorization

⁵ Bert Klandermans and Marga de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest", in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, ed. Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J Owens and Robert W White, 69-92, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 68.

⁶ Verata Taylor and Nancy E Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization", in *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D Moris and Carol M Mueller, 104-130, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

⁷ Verata Taylor and Nancy E Whittier, "Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture: The Culture of Women's Movement", in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 163-187, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press/UCL Press, 1995.

⁸ Klandermans and de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest".

and -comparison⁹¹⁰¹¹. A social identity arises through a cognitive process, wherein one consciously categorizes oneself with an in-group in opposition to an out-group based on contrasting evaluations, which, in result, works to enhance one's self-esteem. In other words, this is a process, where an individual becomes a part of a category, i.e. deindividualization, by accentuating the supposed similarities between self and a positively-weighted in-group and the differences with a negatively-weighted out-group. Beyond the psychology of in- and out-group formation, social identity theory's elucidation on identity management – status- and mobility-management of an inferior group and their members – sheds light on how people with a negatively-perceived social group strengthens their in-group identity to raise a collective voice to alter their status. Here, collective actions to better the inferior status in regards to their out-group counterparts depends on, first, the stability of their in-group status, and, second, the permeability of the group-boundaries. Put differently, members of a negatively-perceived in-group can strengthen their group-identity to act collectively to change their situation, if their status is seen illegitimate and, if their intra-group relations are stable enough to carry out such actions. Cases, where protesters mobilize around their unjust situation that they share as a group, e.g. student protests across Austria and Germany against the 'Bologna Process' in 2009, exemplify the capability of and preference for collective actions taken by in-group members followed by group-identification. It should be noted here that group-identification, which potential in-group members make, does not simply derive from their primordial qualifications, e.g. ethnicity, gender, race, or religion, but rather from a self-made and voluntary alignment, for which membership allows heterogeneous individuals to politicize their collective-identity and -actions¹².

Construction of collective identity in the light of social movement literature refers to the kind of process that a group collectively engages in, of which outcome reflects the cultural production of collective consciousness, as opposed to the social psychological process of individual efforts that are made in the context of deindividualization and self-categorization based on membership¹³. Taking the important notes on pursuit of collective identity and social movement into account, the remainder of the article sheds light on the social movements in Macedonia's escalating political crisis since 2014. Construction of collective identity in the context of Macedonian protests tells us a unique story of transformation of 'who-we-are' as a political strategy to appeal to the broader public, to reify the shared experience of social injustice as grounds for mobilization, and, most importantly, to unite people beyond social and political divisions, which had been an underlying characteristic of the earlier social movements in post-socialist Macedonia.

Where It All Began...

The tale of post-socialist Macedonian social movements begins with the limited successes that Macedonia enjoyed following its transition into liberal democracy. Unlike their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe, whose economic liberalization and integration into global market legitimized the 'hegemony of the new order'¹⁴, the political elites of post-socialist Macedonia had benefited from the lack of security amid both regional, e.g. 2001 insurgency, and international crises, e.g. 1995 naming dispute with Greece. In the aftermath of 2001 Albanian insurgency and the legislative election in the following year, a new coalition government was formed between *SDSM* and

⁹ Michael A Hogg et al., "A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory", *Social Psychological Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1995).

¹⁰ Jan E Stets and Peter J Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory", *Social Psychological Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000).

¹¹ Henri Tajfel et al., "The Social Dimension in European Social Psychology", in *The Social Dimension: European Developments in Social Psychology*, ed. Henri Tajfel, 1-5, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

¹² Klandermans and de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest".

¹³ This is the difference between the social construction of collective beliefs at a group-level and their appropriation at an individual-level.

¹⁴ Ljupcho Petkovski and Ditmar Nikolovski, "Populism and Progressive Social Movements in Macedonia", *Czech Journal of Political Science* 2, (2016).

Democratic Union for Integration, *DUI*, and this marked a new era for Macedonian politics with increasing ethnic nationalism from the opposition and diminishing trust in neo-liberal politics among ethnic Macedonians. The limited political and economic success that the country saw under the reign of *SDSM* and *BDI* paved a way for the rise of an authoritarian, nationalist, and anti-elitist opposition leader, namely Nikola Gruevski, in 2006, whose anti-liberal and -pluralist politics strongly revolved around making of the 'real people' – the victims of pro-Albanian and -European liberal elites. Authoritarian populism led by Gruevski and his *VMRO-DPMNE* had largely benefited from a deep popular dissatisfaction with the exclusive and non-transparent multiethnic coalition between *SDSM* and *BDI*, whose autocratic decision-making style had met with strong criticisms from domestic to international NGOs, from local to central authorities, and from ethnic Macedonians to populist politicians, who had successfully politicized democratic deficits of post-socialist Macedonia into an ethnic problem. In the increasing ethnic tension in the post-Ohrid Framework Agreement¹⁵ regime – fueled by high unemployment rate; low wages; ever-worsening domestic economy; corruption and crime, the self-proclaimed 'true defender of the nation' had finally won its battle against the 'betrayers' of Macedonian people in 2006 Parliamentary Election¹⁶¹⁷.

Electoral success of Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE* in 2006 is not dissimilar from the rise of populism witnessed elsewhere in post-socialist Europe. In Macedonia too, construction of the new 'we' and 'others' strongly centered around populists' accusation on liberal and social-democrat – or former communist – political elite, accompanied by delegitimization of democratic and liberal institutions in the name of the 'real people'. Much like other post-socialist countries, e.g. *Fidesz*'s success in 2002 Hungarian Parliamentary Election; or 2005 electoral victory of *PiS*, Law and Justice, in Poland, the 'real people' of Macedonia – with support of Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE* – responded to the failing 'liberal' government. Making of the 'real people' in Macedonian context, however, had a strong ethnic flair. Because the long-standing ethnic division between Albanian and Macedonians was left un- and mistreated under the previous government, a number of interethnic resolutions proposed by the *SDSM* and *BDI* coalition, e.g. controversial 2004 Law on Territorial Organization¹⁸, dismayed much of ethnic Macedonian voters. Mass protests in July 2004, exemplify the birth of a new collective identity amid mounting discontents among Macedonians anchored in their shared experience with increasing social instability under the previous government; in monoethnic solidarity fueled by radical nationalist rhetoric of populist politicians; and in successful politicization of their 'difference' with pro-Albanian and -European elite 'others'. With thereafter-followed election victory of *VMRO-DPMNE* in 2006, anti-pluralist and -liberal politics prospered, defamation of the political opposition intensified, and, consequently, the schism between the 'real people' and 'others' that its political legitimacy had dependent on had widened¹⁹.

Fragmented 'We' in Earlier Movements against Authoritarian Populism

Making of the 'real people' has consistently been a driving force behind the authoritarian politics of Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE*, since 2006. It won't be an overstatement to say that nationalist rhetoric of the 'we-and-others' binary in their decade-long reign was of utmost importance, as the political legitimacy of Macedonian populism had always been deeply rooted in its 'struggle' against the so-

¹⁵ In the aftermath of 2001 Albanian Insurgency, both ethnic Albanian and Macedonian political parties agreed on implementation of multiethnic policies across the nation. These included constitutional amendments for the veto rights for Albanian communities in some of major policy areas, e.g. education, finance, language, and local politics among others.

¹⁶ Jovan Ananiev, "Factors for Strengthening of the Right-Oriented Parties in Macedonia", *Balkan Social Science Review*, no. 1, (2013).

¹⁷ Kamelia R Dimitrova, "Municipal Decisions on the Border of Collapse: Macedonian Decentralization and the Challenges of Post-Ohrid Democracy", *Southern European Politics* 5, no. 2-3, (2004).

¹⁸ The law proposed a re-organization of local municipalities that eventually gave ethnic Albanians greater autonomy in the areas with larger Albanian populations.

¹⁹ Ljupcho Petkovski, "Authoritarian Populism and Hegemony: Constructing 'the People' in Macedonia's illiberal discourse. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 3, no. 2, (2015).

called 'transitional elite'²⁰. Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE*'s obsession with construction and maintenance of the 'real people' is perhaps best-exemplified in their trademark project, *Skopje 2014*²¹, as well as in the protests that had taken place following its proposal in 2009. When the government first announced the initial proposal for an urban re-generation project in the city center of Skopje, a group of architecture students, *First Archi Brigade*, from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje organized sporadic demonstrations – although these loosely organized protests were met only with a minor success. Engineering a coherent collective-history-narrative for the 'real people' of Macedonia through a kitschy urban beautification project was opposed mainly from architects, students, and local authorities whose organization, however, remained yet peripheral and failed to draw attention of the broader public²². A collective voice that the *First Archi Brigade* and Co. sought to establish against *Skopje 2014* – to the authoritarian nature of Gruevski's policy-making to a larger extent – was fragile, e.g. loose organization through social media, and fragmented, e.g. exclusive criteria for in-group members, to expand the shared definition for an in-group to the wider population – hence, limited shared experience of and solidarity against social injustice. In spite of their appeal to the 'citizens' to 'wake up, for once with their own heads, and become actors in the building...their city's future instead of remaining merely passive observers'²³, lack of cognitive definitions of a shared experience of social injustice among ordinary Macedonians was evident in a number of the counter-protests that followed soon after. This is crucial, because, for potential in-group members with diverse qualifications to come to see themselves as a collective entity, they need to correspondingly establish a sense of 'we-ness' 'within a language that is...specific to the group'²⁴ in relation to the environment, and the social and political 'others'. Construction of collective identity in a social movement, therefore, is a process, wherein a diverse bunch of social actors come together and learn themselves as unified subjects. The relationship between collective identity and a social movement is then a symbiotic one, because, as the movement progresses, the collective identity matures, and, in turn, as the collective identity strengthens, it defines the 'continuity and permanence of the movement over time'²⁵. The spirit of 2009 student protest short-lived, and its anti-populist narrative failed to appeal to the more conservative, religious, and yet-deeply-divided ethnic communities of Macedonia. What initially began as a protest against the autocratic decision-making process of populist politics again reaffirmed the deep schism between the 'real people' and the 'others', as the counter- and protests became a mere proxy war between the governing *VMRO-DPMNE* and the opposition parties²⁶. A failure to re-negotiate the 'collective' in relation to concrete 'others' makes any further collective action impossible²⁷, and this was too strongly featured in other Macedonian social movements prior to 2014.

The beating of – and the eventual killing of – Martin Neskovski in June 2011 and the thereafter-followed protests against police brutality is another example of the failed management of a sustainable collective identity in earlier Macedonian social movements. To the public uproar over the death of Neskovski, who was beaten to death by Macedonian special police taskforce, *Tiger*, at the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ A highly controversial urban renewal project that was designed to give the city of Skopje a more neo-classical image. Macedonian government was heavily criticized for spending up to 560 billion Euros on construction of historicist buildings, monuments, and sculptures – in spite of more than 30% unemployment rate at the time. Between 2012 and 2014, around 20 administrative buildings, concert halls, and museums were constructed and over 40 monuments were erected across the city center.

²² Ljupcho Petkovski and Dimitar Nikolovski, "Populism and Progressive Social Movements in Macedonia".

²³ Elena Ignatova, "Macedonia: Student Protest Ends in Violence", *Global Voices*, March 31, 2009, <https://globalvoices.org/2009/03/31/macedonia-student-protest-ends-in-violence> (accessed May 18, 2017).

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶ Sinisa J Marusic, "Construction of Controversial Skopje Church Begins", *Balkan Insights*, June 07, 2012, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/construction-of-controversial-skopje-church-begins> (accessed May 20, 2017).

²⁷ Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity".

celebration of VMRO-DPMNE's 2011 election victory²⁸, the central authorities remained silent²⁹. The story of Neskovski quickly spread on social media and the largest demonstration ever-seen in post-socialist Macedonia took place³⁰. Despite the relatively well-defined collective grievances against police brutality, the protests of 2011 summer remained yet insufficient to challenge the authorities, and the voice against the populist regime showed lack of a political context and relevance. The failure to turn their voice into a politically relevant one, in turn, made the protesters difficult to clearly define, first, the concrete 'we' and 'they' that correspond to the conflictual in-group-out-group dynamics, second, the causality between the 'others' and the injustice 'we' face, and, third, lack of self-conscious engagement in a well-defined political struggle on behalf of their in-group and against their political out-group^{31,32,33}. Although the encounter with an authoritarian out-group who held responsible for social injustice paved a way for mass protests, lack of politicized group-awareness failed to expand the boundary of its in-group for the broader public, and their vague political orientation in progress failed to challenge the schism between the 'real people' and 'others' instigated by the populist rhetoric. In a constructivist approach^{34,35,36,37}, collective identity of a social movement is a cultural and social construct, and, therefore, it implies a coming-together of heterogeneous individuals as an in-group in accordance with the trajectory of a movement itself. It is then a process, as Alberto Melucci^{38,39} writes, wherein individuals who are loosely connected through the yet-politicized 'we-and-other' binary learn to see themselves as a more-organized and -institutionalized collective entity. Collective identity, therefore, is the 'ability of a collective actor to reorganize the effects of its actions and to attribute these effects to itself', and a lack of this particular ability was perhaps a decisive factor for the unsustainability of earlier social movements in Macedonia, and for the simultaneous failure of constructing a more inclusive politicized in-group beyond the populist rhetoric of the 'real people' of Macedonia.

Politicized Collective Identity beyond Ethnic Schism in the 2014-2016 Movements

The relational dimension of collective identity highlights the interaction between movement actors, who actively produce shared meanings as the movement progresses, whose ability to reflect their shared experience in collective terms appropriates the outcomes of their actions, and who learn to differentiate themselves from 'others' while continuing to be 'us'. From this constructivist perspective, collective identity is not a mere reaction of a naturally-given population to the environment, but a process, wherein the movement actors must learn to identify themselves as a collective entity in a clear dis-identification with the external environment⁴⁰. Collective identity, therefore, is generated by a coming-together of diverse individuals as an in-group who builds 'shared

²⁸ In June, 2011, Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE had won their 3rd consecutive victory in the parliamentary elections.

²⁹ Sinisa J Marusic, "Macedonia Protest over 'Fatal Police Beating', *Balkan Insights*, May 12, 2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonians-protest-after-police-murders-youngster> (accessed June 3, 2017).

³⁰ Ljupcho Petkovski and Dimitar Nikolovski, "Populism and Progressive Social Movements in Macedonia".

³¹ William A Gamson, *Taking Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992.

³² Bert Klandermans and Marga de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest".

³³ Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans, "Politicized Collective Identity: A Social Psychological Analysis", *American Psychologist* 56, no. 4, (2001).

³⁴ Cristina F Fominaya, "Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates", *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 6 (2010).

³⁵ Bert Klandermans and Marga de Weerd, "Group Identification and Political Protest".

³⁶ Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity".

³⁷ Francesca Polletta and James M Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements", *Annual Review of Sociology* 37, (2001).

³⁸ Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity".

³⁹ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1996.

⁴⁰ This is what Alberto Melucci calls a processual approach to collective identity, wherein in-group members learn to respond to the external social world by redefinition and reconstruction of their actions that correspond to new social and political orientations over the course of their phased development.

memories'⁴¹ through a shared history of protest-participation, of which outcome – ‘movement identity’⁴² – is central to its sustainability and permanence. Sustainable collective identity requires, however, more than just an ‘interactive and shared definition...concerned with the orientation of action and field of opportunities and constraints...’⁴³. The failures of 2009 and 2011 demonstrations against an urban beautification project and police brutality did not derive from lack of strong interaction between in-group members *per se*, but, rather, from lack of political relevance in their collective voice that could mobilize actors in a self-conscious political struggle of the broader public. This inclusive context is an important one, because political struggles mostly involve ‘third parties’ aside from those who are immediately involved in a conflict. This more inclusive and societal context is what Bernd Simon and Klandermans (2001) call a ‘tripod approach’ that sees the in- and out-group boundaries to be more fluid and flexible, because inclusion of the broader public itself acts as a strategy to claim the legitimacy of a social movement against the discredited authorities. For sustainable collective identity for a long-standing social movement, the inclusive and societal context of a power struggle is of utmost importance for the in-group members to engage in a self-conscious action, where their collective voice speaks for the interest of the broader public.

Following the fourth election victory of Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE*, the general repertoire of anti-authoritarianism dominated the protest scene of mid-2014. The opposition leaders, namely Zoran Zaev in *SDSM* accused Gruevski of election fraud, and, in return, the four-time Prime Minister condemned his political rivals for working behind the ‘real people’ who, as a senior member of *VMRO-DPMNE* said in an interview, ‘did not allow to be taken in by the manipulative scenarios from the opposition’⁴⁴. The power game between *VMRO-DPMNE* and *SDSM*, as well as the soon-after followed protests, didn’t differ much from the long-standing turmoil that had pervaded Macedonia’s political scene in the last decade, and its discourse seemed insufficient to diverge from the populist rhetoric of the ‘real people’ and the pro-Western and –EU ‘transitional elites’. After the government’s decision to introduce a state-sponsored exam across universities in late 2014, however, social movements in Macedonia took a different turn. A series of authoritarian reforms in the education sector not only fueled mass demonstrations by the students and professors, but, this time, their grievances against the ruling party were able to reflect a deep dissatisfaction with the decade-long reign of Gruevski and *VMRO-DPMNE* shared by the wider public. This shared awareness of grievances is a particularly important one, because collectively-defined grievances against social and political injustice can transform ‘my/your’ predicament into ‘ours’, e.g. wide-spread political oppression, because ‘our’ unjust predicament as an in-group becomes a driving force behind a struggle against a ‘common’ enemy, e.g. authorities, and because then the actors in this confrontation with a well-defined political out-group can appeal to the public-at-large as a part of society, e.g. a nation-wide movement identity and an eventual overthrow of the ruling elites. The more inclusive and societal context of the 2014-2016 student movements was strongly featured in their multiethnic outlook. In contrast to the vivid ethnic flair in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s student movements⁴⁵, the cross-ethnic mobilization of post-2014 protests meant a successful deviation from the hitherto-prevalent ethnic division between Macedonians and Albanians for more inclusive collective identity upon shared experiences of social and political injustice. The departure from the ethnic scope to a broader and more inclusive movement paved a road for a coming-together of the fragmented voices in deep social and political divisions of post-socialist Macedonia, and its inclusive and societal context redefined the struggle against authoritarianism in collective terms that concerned the common interest of Macedonian

⁴¹ Cristina F Fominaya, “Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates”, 398.

⁴² William A Gamson, Commitment and Agency in Social Movements, *Sociological Forum* 6, no. 1, 1991.

⁴³ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*.

⁴⁴ Kole Casule, “Macedonian opposition cries election foul, will not accept results”, *Reuters*, April 27, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/amp/idUKBREA3POL820140427> (accessed June 1, 2017)

⁴⁵ Lura Pollozhani, “The Student Movement in Macedonia 2014-2016”, *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* no. 5-6, 2016.

society-at-large. The new sense of 'post-ethnic' solidarity diverged from the schism between the 'we-and-others' binary in populist rhetoric, whereby the protesters and the public came to understand the movement as a cross-ethnic and –political struggle. This was an invitation for 'social bystanders', third party⁴⁶, to a new form of self-consciousness for a collective struggle, which nurtured the politicization of collective movement identity – a prerequisite for a sustainable social movement⁴⁷. 'Enough Silence!'⁴⁸, *Dosta bese molk*, was no more an outcry of just university students against the authoritarian education reforms, but that of shared grievances in civil society against the oppressive political regime that had impeded Macedonia's democratic development. Another important aspect to be credited for the success of cross-ethnic and –political mobilization of the 2014-2016 student movement came not only from the protesters, but their political opponents. Once mass demonstrations began after the proposal of state-sponsored university exams, Gruevski's cabinet not only failed to respond to the protesters' demands, but continued to pursue a number of other controversial policies, including higher *ex gratia* payment tax imposition and the faux-baroque beautification project in the capital city, *Skopje 2014*. This was a crucial factor for successful mobilization of a much wider in-group, wherein the actors across different movements, e.g. contract workers movement in 2015⁴⁹; and 'I love GTC' movement against demolishment of City Trade Center⁵⁰, could come together as a collective body against the common enemy beyond issue-based organization. The success the 2014-2016 student movement made epitomizes the significance of politicized collective identity for sustainability and permanence of a social movement. As their grievances were shared by the general public, their struggle became a struggle for the common interest of civil society. As their struggle became 'our' struggle against the oppressive authorities, it became a movement of society-at-large, whose members developed a mutual group-identity beyond the ethnic, gender, or religious divisions that had hitherto dominated its political scene. Then there was sustainable collective identity born, and this served as a prelude to the thereafter-followed 'I Protest', *Protestiram*, and 'Colorful Revolution', *Sarena Revolucija* – nation-wide movements against *Skopje 2014*, which saw the eventual overthrow of the *VMRO-DPMNE* – *DUI* coalition in 2016 Parliamentary Election⁵¹.

In Conclusion – What was It All for?

After months of relentless coalition talks, as well as a series of 'tough talks' from European Union and NATO, Zaev's *SDSM* formed a new government with his Albanian coalition partners in May 2017. The story of the 2014-2016 student movements that finally brought an end to the decade-long reign of Gruevski, however, is far from complete, as the 'guardian of the real people' – despite abuses of power, wide-spread corruption, rife nepotism and among many other – still maintains a narrow parliamentary majority. It is true that the deep division between political parties nevertheless continues to pervade Macedonia. It is also true that populist rhetoric of the 'real people' and the pro-Albanian and –EU 'transitional elite' is after all still rampant in its political scene. Storming of the parliament by angry *VMRO-DPMNE* supporters in April 2017 evidences that the long-standing divisions in Macedonian politics yet live and that the defeat of authoritarian populism may not come

⁴⁶ Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans, "Politicized Collective Identity: A Sociological Analysis".

⁴⁷ Verata Tayler and Nancy E Whittier, "Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture: The Culture of the Women's Movement".

⁴⁸ As it was in the earlier protests in the early 2010s, 'enough silence' was a popular protest slogan in the 2014 student movement that criticized both the oppressive – and unresponsive – Gruevski's regime and the non-political stance taken in the previous movements.

⁴⁹ Sinisa J Marusic, "Macedonia Contract Workers Protest Tax Increase", *Balkan Insights*, December 22, 2014, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-contract-workers-protest-tax-increase> (accessed June 11, 2017).

⁵⁰ Goran Janev, "Skopje 2014: Erasing Memories, Building History", in *Balkan Heritages: Negotiating History and Culture*, ed. Maria Couroucli and Tchavdar Marinov, 111-130, Farnham: Ashgate.

⁵¹ Albeit the narrow election win, Gruevski's *VMRO-DPMNE* had failed to form a new coalition with his Albanian partners, and, for the first time in more than a decade, a new government led by *SDSM* under Zaev was formed in May 2017.

as soon as anticipated by the protesters. The real success of the 2014-2016 student movements, however, lies on the shared experience of a coming-together as a unified actor against social and political injustice, not much so on the macro-level outcomes that alter the politics-at-large. In contrast to their predecessors, the protesters of the 2014-2016 student movements learned to understand their grievances towards authoritarian populism in collective terms, came together as a unified entity for a collective struggle against the unjust authorities, and, more importantly, managed to work out a movement identity beyond the ethnicity-based group-membership that had dominated the previous movements. The success of the 2014-2016 student movements – in fact, that of any other social movement against social and political injustice – shall not only be measured by the ostensible large-scale political changes, but by the new sense of collective identity that brought cultural impacts to civil society, that produced new movement biographies not only of direct participants but of the wider public, and that made an example of a successful social movement for future generations.

Authoritarian populism pervades, not only this small landlocked former Yugoslavian republic, but across Eastern and Southeast Europe. The causes behind this phenomenon differ from case to case, and so do their trajectories, as well as their social and political outcomes. The tale of Macedonian social movements, however, provides us an important lens through which we can look at the varying degrees of success and failure of social movements in the region we had witnessed over the years. How does a social movement successfully generate collective identity? How can protesters maintain a sustainable movement that speaks for the common interest of ‘social bystanders’? Why does the inclusive and societal context matter for the sustainability and permanence of a social movement? Protests against authoritarian populism are not new in Eastern and Southeast Europe. As the 2016 protests against media oppression under *PiS* in Poland or more recent protests in Serbia over the alleged election fraud of Alexander Vučić exemplify, young protesters and ‘liberal’ politicians in the region do not remain silent in the face of social and political injustice. Their failures to generate a long-lasting social movement and appeal to society-at-large, however, make one thing clear: without shared awareness of grievances against the common ‘enemy’, and without a collective identity with political relevance that speaks for the ‘silent majority’⁵², a movement is left peripheral, its grievances fail to become ‘our’ predicament, and, as result, it remains insufficient to win its power struggle against the authoritarian populist authorities.

⁵² Gabriel Mugny, *The Power of Minorities*, London: Academic Press.